

LAST WORDS.

Dear hearts, whose love has been so sweet to know,
That I am looking backward as I go,
Am I sincere while I haste, and in this rain
Of tears of joy am I sincere: tears of pain.
Do not adorn with costly shrub or tree,
Or flower, the little grave which shelters me
Let the wild wind-sown seeds grow up un-
harméd.
And back and forth all summer unaltered,
Let all the tiny, busy creatures creep.
Let the sweet grass its last year's tangles
keep.
And when, remembering me, you come some
day
And stand there, speak no praise but only say,
"How she loved us!" 'Twas that which made
her dear!
Those are the words that I shall joy to hear
—Helen Hunt Jackson.

Lady Latimer's Escape.

BY CHARLOTTE M. BRAEME.

CHAPTER II—CONTINUED.

She looked to me beautiful as the pictured angels in the old gallery at Lorton's Cray. Yet it was the face of a woman, not of an angel; and when I came to look more deeply into it, I saw uneasiness, languor, pride; at times unutterable fatigue, unutterable scorn, then something like despair; the light died from the proud eyes, and the lines deepened round the beautiful lips.

All at once I started with amazement; for she was looking at our pew, and I saw a smile pass like a sunbeam over her face. I looked at the long row of children; they were all, outwardly, at least, decently behaved. One or two of them had their eyes and mouths opened very wide, and were fascinated by Lady Latimer. Then her eyes met mine, and I saw in them a tender light, a beautiful gleam. The old lord, looking very stern and gray, sat by her side—May and December, indeed.

More than once I caught the beautiful eyes fixed on mine. I cannot tell how it was, but a certain conviction came to me that she was not happy. Despite her grand title of Lady Latimer, of Lorton's Cray; despite her beauty, which was greater than I had ever seen; despite her rich dress and her jewels and the magnificence that surrounded her she was not happy. I cannot tell how it happened, but it seemed to me her eyes were telling me so, and that it was a secret known only to herself and me; but that must have been fancy.

I was like a bird fascinated. I could not look away from her. I am very much afraid that I thought of nothing else. I saw her watch our family procession down the church; always eccentric, it was this time more peculiar than ever, owing to the fact that Bob, whose expression of countenance was perfectly angelic, had pinned Millie's cape to Archie's jacket, and the wildest confusion ensued. We had reached home before it ended. Imperial justice was administered later on.

The next day Lord and Lady Latimer called. The army of boys had been sent to King's Lorton, under the pretext of purchasing a new cricket bat. Our pretty vicarage looked its best. It was the month of May, and the lilacs were all in bloom; the beautiful syringa-trees were all in flower; the house was a perfect bower; the birds were singing in the trees all round it.

I shall never forget how the fair, queenly presence of that beautiful woman brightened even our cheerful rooms. She was in the drawing-room when I went in, talking to my mother. Lord Latimer was discussing a late edition of Virgil with my father. Lady Latimer held out her hand to me, with a smile so bright and beautiful it almost dazzled me.

"I saw you in church yesterday, Miss Lovel," she said, "and I have come to ask if you will be my friends." If I could describe her grace, her sweetness! If she had said to me, "Audrey Lovel, from this moment you become my bond-slave, and attach yourself to me for life," I should have done so. I loved her after the fashion of enthusiastic young girls, with a full and perfect love.

"I have been telling Mrs. Lovel," she continued, "how much your face attracted me. I wanted to see you yesterday."

She had a wonderfully sweet voice, low and caressing. She went on: "And those delightful boys of yours, how I enjoyed seeing them! I am sorry they are out. Mrs. Lovel, you must let me have them all over at Lorton's Cray."

My mother smiled. "I am afraid, Lady Latimer," she said, "you would hardly survive it. A French revolution or a Cuban insurrection is bad enough; but the boys visiting together is beyond imagination even," and the dear, gentle mother smiled as she thought of it.

"Nevertheless," said Lady Latimer, "I shall hope to see them. It is very lonely at Lorton's Cray."

And I saw, plainly as I heard the words, a fine, quick gleam of scorn that lighted for half a minute on her husband's face, and then was gone.

"Are you dull and lonely, Grace?" he asked. "I am sorry. You will soon have plenty of visitors."

For a few minutes he was moody and silent, then he turned suddenly to my mother.

"Mrs. Lovel," he said, "it is in your

power to do me the greatest favor. You hear that Lady Latimer complains of feeling dull; will you allow Miss Lovel to pay us a visit? In fact, if it will be convenient to you, to go back with us now? It will be a pleasure to Lady Latimer and myself."

The beautiful face brightened, the gracious hand was held out to me.

"How kind! Will you come, Miss Lovel? I should be so delighted."

If she had said, "Will you come to Siberia with me?" I should have gone. The fair, queenly beauty, the mystery in the dark eyes, and her gracious, winning manner, had laid me under a spell.

"It will be a great pleasure to me, Lady Latimer," I answered.

"And will you tell me all about the boys?" she said.

"All about the boys would mean a long biography of each one," I answered; "but I will give you the leading points in each career."

"That will do," she rejoined, laughingly. "I am so glad you will come, Miss Lovel."

Then I went to my own room to make some preparations, and my mother followed me.

"It seems a strange thing, mamma," I said, "for Lady Latimer to want me, and to wish to take me home with her now."

"I do not think it strange, Audrey," she said, "not at all. Evidently, Lady Latimer is very dull and very lonely, and Lord Latimer is anxious that she should have a companion. I think, my dear, added my beautiful mother, with a gentle sigh, "that it is an excellent thing for you. It will bring you into good society; indeed, I think it is most providential for us all. Lady Latimer has evidently taken a fancy to you. It will be good for the boys, too."

Now, anything for the good of the boys was as irresistible to me as to my mother, and a glorious vision of unlimited toys and fruit came before our eyes.

"I should think," said my mother, "that Lady Latimer is about your age, Audrey; she does not look one day older."

"And her husband more than sixty," I cried. "It seems very unnatural, mamma."

"Such marriages are often made in high life," said my mother. She bent down and kissed me. "I am glad," she said, "that we do not belong to what is called high life. I should not like you, my Audrey, to marry in that fashion. I wonder how long will you stay at Lorton's Cray?"

"Two or three days; most probably," I replied. "Mamma, do you know that the first moment I saw Lady Latimer—the first moment that her eyes looked into mine, I knew that we should be something to each other? Her eyes said so plainly."

"Fancy, my dear," answered my gentle mother.

I knew it was not fancy, but truth.

CHAPTER III.

My few preparations were soon made. Lord Latimer was profuse in his thanks to my parents. It was so good, so kind, so generous of them to spare me; he was so grateful. It was such a sad thing for Lady Latimer to feel herself so dull—so unfortunate; but in my cheerful society no doubt she would rally. His words sounded kindly, but there was an evil look in the old lord's eyes as he uttered them.

Then we all three drove away together, and the wonder, the dream of my life, came true—I was at home at Lorton's Cray. "What would the boys say?" That was my first thought as we drove along, and I longed to hear the remarks and comments that would be made in the august assembly.

Then my companions attracted all my attention. I began to see why Lady Latimer was dull and lonely. The old lord was by no means a pleasant, amusing, or even agreeable companion; he was silent and saturnine. If he expressed an idea, it was either false, mean, or ignoble; if he uttered a sentiment, it was either morbid or cynical; if he made a remark, it was sure to jar in some way or other on one. He talked to me during the greater part of the drive; he could not forget that Lady Latimer had complained of feeling dull; he seemed to resent it as an insult to himself; he reverted to it continually.

If I had been Lady Latimer, I should have lost both temper and patience; but when she saw the turn things were taking, she leaned back in the carriage and said nothing.

What weariness crept over that beautiful face! What sadness came into the proud eyes! The bright May sunshine, the flowering limes, the springing grasses, brought no smiles to her lips. I was almost dazed with delight to drive on that lovely spring day through that delicious, odoriferous air. To see the depths of the blue sky, the light of the sun, the bloom of the spring flowers; to hear the lark and the thrush, the bleating of the little lambs in the meadows—had filled me with delight that was almost intoxicating; my heart and soul, my whole nature, seemed to expand. But on the beautiful face opposite to me there was no smile. I do not remember that husband and wife exchanged one word. Verily, May and Decem-

ber, eighteen and sixty, could never agree.

When the carriage stopped before the great entrance-hall door, and I stood on the threshold of Lorton's Cray, a curious sensation came over me—a foreboding, but such a mixture of sorrow and joy that I could not understand it. I felt the shadow of coming evil and the brightness of coming joy. The emotion was so strong that I felt all the color die from my face and lips; my heart beat, my hands trembled. It seemed to me that I had gone quite suddenly into another world. Lord Latimer gave me a very kind but stately welcome.

"You look tired, Miss Lovel," he said; "you had better have a glass of wine."

"Come with me to my room, Miss Lovel," said Lady Latimer, not seeming to heed her husband's words; and we went up the grand staircase together.

Ah, what luxury! what magnificence! what splendor! I was struck by the great white statues, holding aloft richly colored lamps, masses of crimson flowers at their feet. She swept up the grand staircase, looking neither to the right or left, and hastened to her room.

"That's a relief," she cried, as she sunk into the depths of an easy chair; "a most blessed and unmitigated relief."

"What is?" I asked wonderingly.

Her face crimsoned. "To get in-doors," she answered quickly; but I felt sure that she did not mean that when she spoke first.

Then Lady Latimer rose from her chair. She took off her hat and mantle.

"I prefer dressing and undressing myself to having a maid always about me," she said. "Shall I ring for Hilton for you?"

"I have never had a maid in all my life," I answered, thinking of the toilets at home and the struggle to get through them.

"That is right," she said heartily.

I looked around that magnificent sleeping-room. The hangings were all of blue velvet and white silk; the carpet of light blue velvet piled with white flowers; a few exquisite pictures adorned the walls; ornaments of every description abounded; the toilet-tables seemed to me one blaze of silver and richly cut glass; one door opened into a bath-room superbly fitted; another into a beautiful boudoir, all blue and white. A balcony ran along the windows, filled with the loveliest, rarest and most fragrant flowers. Everything that money could purchase or art suggest was in those beautiful rooms. I thought to myself as I looked around, "How enviably happy the owner of all this magnificence must be!" I was soon to find out that all the magnificence in the world could not confer happiness.

"Come into the boudoir," said Lady Latimer. "How pleasant it is to have some one to talk to and laugh with. There are days when my very nature seems starved for the want of laughter."

"And we have so much of it," said I involuntarily.

"Yes. When I saw that row of smiling, happy faces at church, my heart went out to them; the tears came into my eyes, and I longed to be among them. She drew me to herself in a half-caressing fashion inexpressibly graceful. "I am so glad that you came back with me, Miss Lovel. I can never tell you how I felt when I saw you. I am sure that, in some strange manner or other, you are going to make part of my life, or be involved in it in some way."

"I had the same feeling," I replied, wonderingly.

"Then," said Lady Latimer, "it is true that there is something in it. I am very lonely, and needed a friend. You have such a frank face, so noble and true. You are dark and beautiful. I like dark, beautiful faces. You are sympathetic; I need sympathy. We shall be good friends, Miss Lovel."

"I hope so," was my answer. I knew that in my heart I loved her well enough to be her constant friend all my life. Then she threw off the sadness and weariness that lay over her like a shadow.

"Miss Lovel," she said, "have you been over the house?"

"Two years ago," I answered; and I then told her of the great awe that had fallen over the boys at the sight of all the magnificence. Laughingly I told her how the boys had implored me to marry some one with a house just like this, for their especial use and benefit.

"There is many a truth spoken in jest," said Lady Latimer; "but never do that, my dear; let nothing ever tempt you to marry for the sake of a grand house, or money, or position. It is the most horrible mistake that a woman ever makes. Sooner die than that."

"I never shall, Lady Latimer," I replied; then, thinking of home, I added: "I should never have a chance, no matter even if I might desire it." Our only visitors were the curate and the doctor.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

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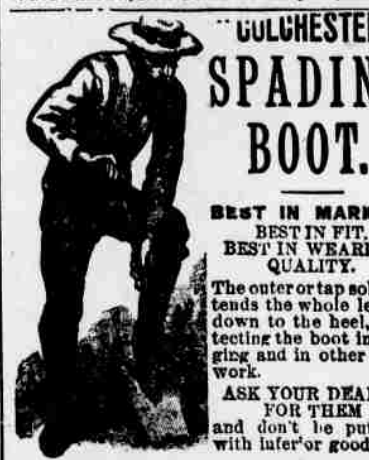
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